

# DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES

Prepared for The Board of Selectmen, Acton  
Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005

Updated: by the DRB  
August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## What are Design Review Guidelines?

- A collection of Standards & Design Concepts that Towns compile to promote development that enhances town 'character' and overall health & economic viability
- Typically, DRGs cover architectural features, including facades as well as scale, building siting, signage & landscaping & pedestrian accessibility – for new construction
- They augment zoning codes; they often have lots of photographs & drawings unlike the codes – they show 'the vision'
- DRGs provide a basis for towns to negotiate with developers

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## What communities have DRGs?

Amesbury, Amherst, Blackstone River Valley, Boston, Boxborough, Brewster, Brookline, Cambridge-North, Cambridge-East, Canton, Cohasset, Dedham, Duxbury, Edgartown, Falmouth, Foxborough, Franklin, Gill, Grafton, Great Barrington, Hanover, Harwich, Hopkinton, Hull, Lawrence, Lexington, Marblehead, Marlborough, Mashpee, Montague, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, Northborough, Orleans, Plymouth, Salem, Sharon, Sturbridge, Sudbury, Swampscott, Wellesley, Westborough, Winchester, Winthrop, Woburn, Yarmouth

Communities with DRGs in development? Groton, Mansfield, Wrentham, Boxborough is expanding its DRGs to business district on 111....[Concord is developing DRG specifically for West Concord in 2009...](#)

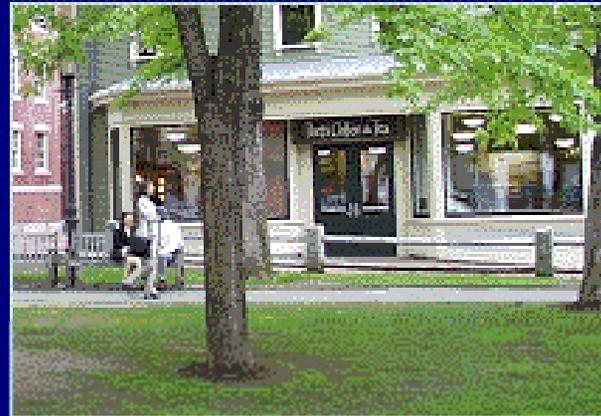


# What DRGs look like -

Built Form -- Street-level

## MIXED-USE & RETAIL

- Avoid blank walls on streets and pedestrian walkways



- This slide show was presented to the Cambridge Planning Board in January 2002. It provides an explanation of the Eastern Cambridge Design guidelines adopted in Oct 01.

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## Goals

- Create active streets
- Create new public open spaces
- Create expanded retail opportunities
- Strengthen pedestrian and bicycle connections

# DRGs – Promote a Master Plan

This slide show was presented to the Cambridge Planning Board in January 2002. It provides an explanation of the Eastern Cambridge Design guidelines adopted in Oct 2001.

## DRGs in – “Acton Comprehensive Community Plan - Emerging Vision and Goals for Acton’s Future (2008)”

Page 76

- “To better manage growth, use site and design review to be more intentional about ensuring that new development is consistent with Town character.”

### Our Priority Challenges are:

- Need to control growth and development
- Need to plan for sustainable future



# Town of Acton

## Design Review Guidelines

### for Commercial Development



February 2007



#### PURPOSE

The purpose of these guidelines are to:

- Streamline the approval process for commercial development
- Promote attractive development of commercial areas
- Preserve and enhance the New England character of the Town's commercial centers and thoroughfares
- Relate commercial properties both visually and physically with surrounding land uses
- Facilitate a more healthful and walk-able suburban atmosphere that integrates pedestrian needs with those of drivers
- Protect property values by enhancing the Town's appearance.

Acton's character is defined by its 19th century village centers and rural New England roots. Successful future development should respect this special past by using contextual sensitive building design with appropriate materials, scale, massing and site planning. Acton has three historic village centers, as well as rural and commercial areas that each have a unique visual context. The following guidelines outline site and building components for successful commercial development throughout the town.



#### DESIGN GUIDELINES

##### Building Placement on Site

New structures should present their main entrance and storefront to the public street and be located no further from the front lot line than adjacent structures on either side of the proposed location. Create a unified and consistent alignment of building facades that define and address the street. Locating the building closer to the street will preserve more open space and also permit more space behind it for parking and service access.

##### Building Massing/Scale

With the objective of maintaining a small town character buildings should appear to be modest in scale relating to the scale of the immediate context if appropriate. Reduce the apparent scale of the building by introducing small scaled architectural features, creating of an irregular footprint and breaking the roofscape with dormers, gables or changes in roof direction. Avoid long expanses of repetitive architectural elements, and flat unarticulated wall surfaces.

##### Existing Structures

Existing buildings and structures of historic value should be preserved and if renovated and expanded done so in a manner that is respectful of the character, features and details of the existing structure. Historic structures are valuable contributors to the Town's character and should be preserved in their original location if possible. Refer to the U.S. Secretary of Interior Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Structures.



**Parking**

Where possible locate parking behind the structure to allow the building to be in closer proximity to the street. This is important for encouraging greater density along the street, creating a more appealing pedestrian environment, and permitting more space for parking and service access. In all cases screen parking with a landscape buffer to minimize its visual impact. Refer to the Zoning Bylaws regarding layout and other design requirements.

**Sidewalks**

Well designed walkways are critical to creating a pedestrian friendly experience. Where building setbacks permit, separate sidewalks from the street with a landscaped buffer. Buildings entrances, parking areas, and important public spaces should be directly served by sidewalks. Refer to Acton's Sidewalk Design Guidelines.

**Signage**

Building signage should be appropriately scaled to the building or surface onto which it is placed, should not obscure important architectural features and should be readable for both pedestrians and drivers approaching the site. Acton has comprehensive signage regulations within its Zoning Bylaws that provide further detailed requirements.

**Storefronts**

Well designed storefronts add vitality to the streetscape encouraging business as well as pedestrian traffic. Retail storefronts should make generous use of glass, face the street or sidewalk and not be obstructed by piers or other features that block view of the display windows. Carefully designed awnings coupled with appropriately scaled signage and lighting will further enhance the storefront's appearance. To the extent possible, storefronts should be continuous, and uninterrupted to maximize its frontage on the public way.

**Lighting**

Acton has adopted a lighting bylaw that encourages energy conservation and eliminates extraneous light that can spill offsite or cause glare. Select pedestrian-scaled light fixtures appropriate to building type and location. Avoid the use of floodlighting, wall packs and tall light posts intended for lighting large areas.

**Windows and Doors**

With the exception of retail storefronts, modestly scaled vertically proportioned windows articulated with muntins are most appropriate to the local building vernacular. Building facades should have an abundance of windows and doors that use clear nonreflective glass. Windows on higher floors should align vertically with windows below if possible. Building entrances should be architecturally prominent, protected from the weather and address the street or primary pedestrian pathway.

**Landscaping**

Thoughtfully designed landscaping appropriate to the context of a small New England town should include the careful use of stone walls, wood fencing, paving materials and plantings. These features can tie a structure to its landscape, define spaces and make for a pleasant pedestrian experience. Preserve mature plantings, stone walls and other historic features where possible and minimize modifications to the natural topography of the site.



**Plantings**

Indigenous planting appropriate to the context should be used and placed in a manner that appears natural and integrated into the landscape. Avoid State listed invasive plant materials. Planting should be grouped to include a variety of types and scale from trees, shrubs, perennials and ground cover. Planting should be used to define spaces, shade pedestrian spaces, soften buildings and to create buffers between public spaces and roads, parking areas and mechanical equipment.

**Public Spaces**

Development should strive to create appealing public spaces and provide pedestrian access and connections to existing public amenities via sidewalks, covered walkways, and lawns. Provide public amenities that invite public use such as benches, water features, and shaded gathering spaces. The character materials and scale of buildings that front public spaces play a vital role in the quality of the space created. In order to strengthen the definition of the public spaces buildings should maximize their frontage on the street and public spaces that they abut.

**Roofs**

It is characteristic of traditional New England architecture and smaller scaled structures that roofs be sloped and articulated with dormers, chimneys, gables, cupolas, etc. Larger structures likewise can benefit from a similar treatment that will break-up the massing into appropriately scaled elements. Avoid large flat roofed areas or conceal them behind parapets or sections of sloped roof.

**Materials**

There is a strong preference for authentic natural materials such as wood, brick, and stone for the exterior of structures and landscape features. Construct windows, storefronts and public doorways of wood where possible. Synthetic materials should be as close in appearance and detail to the natural material it simulates.

**Mechanical Equipment**

Hide mechanical utilities and mechanical equipment from public view. If possible utilities should be placed below grade, ventilation equipment enclosed within the building, and service areas and dumpsters should be screened by parapets, and service areas and dumpsters should be screened from public view.



Referenced by other towns:  
including Ipswich, Mendon,  
presented at The Congress for  
New Urbanism, N.E., 2007,  
Lowell in "New Directions in Design  
Guidelines" session





Design Review Guidelines – A Grassroots Approach

CNU NE

# Design Review Board

## Contact

472 Main St.

Acton, MA 01720

Ph: (978) 790-7776 | [E-mail](#)

## Minutes & Memos

Minutes are available following approval.

[Most Recent Minutes](#) | [View All](#)

View the most recent and all archived memos.

[Most Recent Memo](#) | [View All](#)

## Members

- Ann Sussman, RA, LEED AP, Chair
- Holly Ben Joseph, RLA, Vice-Chair
- Conor Nagle, PE, Member
- Lynne Alpert, Allied Member ASID, Realtor, Member
- Ruth Martin, Planning Board Rep., Member
- David Honn, RA, Associate Member
- Chris Dallmus, AIA, LEED AP, Associate Member
- Ryan Bettez, Planning Board Rep., Alternate

The mission of the Design Review Board is to promote attractive, pedestrian-friendly development that enhances the Town's character and overall quality-of-life. Its intention is also to streamline the commercial development process. To that end, the Design Review Board publishes the [Design Review Guidelines for Commercial Districts](#).



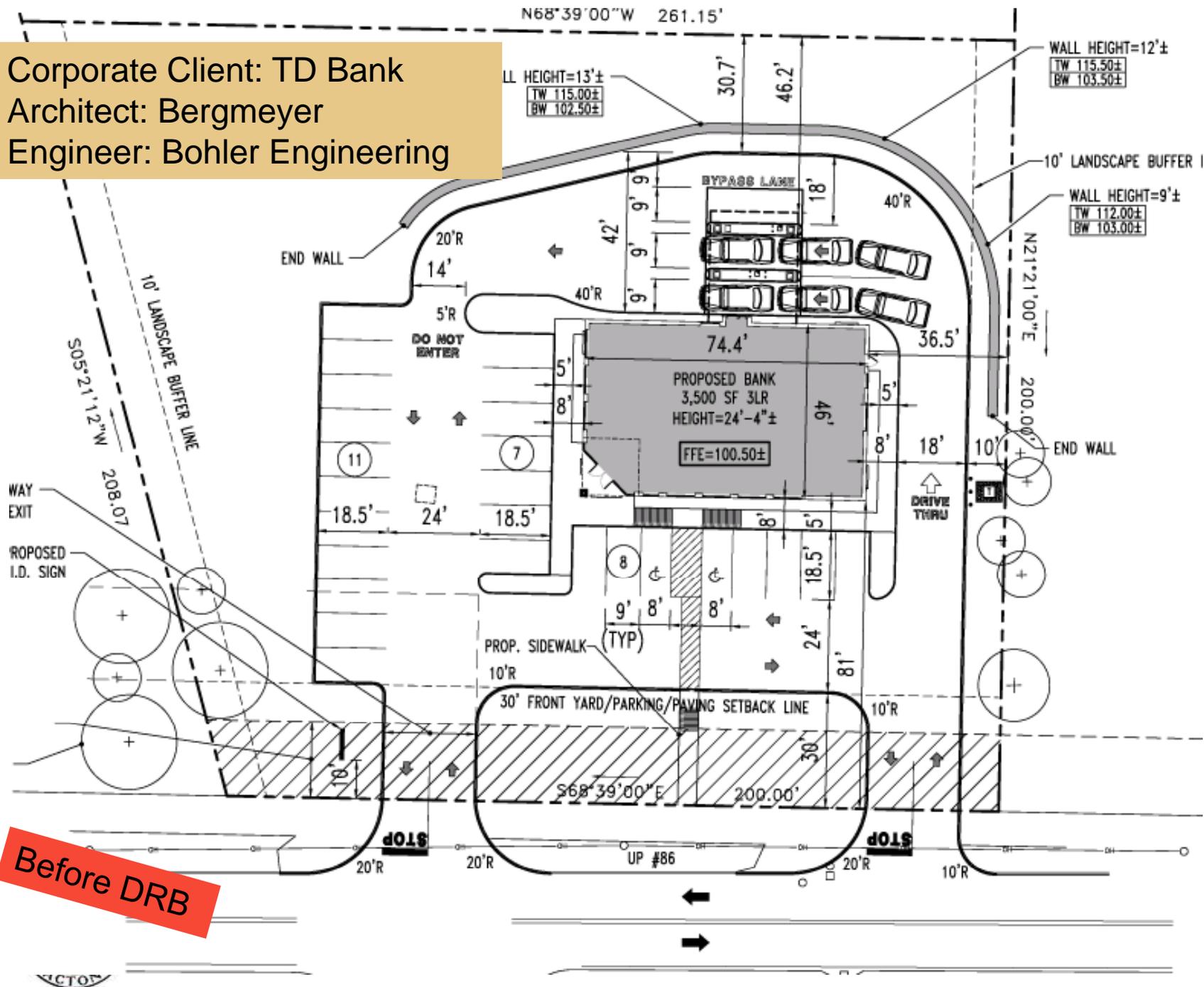
DRB 2009

Corporate Client: New Construction  
Existing Site Conditions



DRB 2009

Corporate Client: TD Bank  
Architect: Bergmeyer  
Engineer: Bohler Engineering



Before DRB



Corporate Client: TD Bank  
Architect: Bergmeyer  
Engineer: Bohler Engineering



Before DRB

Corporate Client: TD Bank  
Architect: Bergmeyer  
Engineer: Bohler Engineering



Corporate Client: Renovation  
Client: Enterprise Bank  
Architect: Keenan & Associates

The board had the following comments:

- At the canopy, add two more columns close to the building.
- Also, integrate the shingles that are on the rest of the building into the design
- Consider a pitched roof to blend in with the existing building.
- Change the window on the side to one that does not have the double hung windows (looks too residential)
- Use native species where possible for the shrub plantings
- Add small trees in the island (min. 7/16/08)



After

ACTON

Corporate Client: Site Rehab  
Client: Bank of America



Before



After



DRB 2009

Mixed-use Speculative Development Project  
Residential/Retail/Office – New Construction  
Existing Site Conditions





Mixed-use Speculative Project  
 Developer: Andrade Development LLC  
 Architect: Peter Quinn Architects



SPRUCE STREET ELEVATIONS (VIEW WEST)



SPRUCE STREET ELEVATIONS (VIEW WEST)

PROJECT  
 232 ARLINGTON S  
 ACTON, MA 01720

PREPARED FOR  
 DEDIC ANDRADE  
 DEVELOPMENT LLC

DRAWING TITLE

Apr '09



SPRUCE STREET ELEVATIONS (VIEW WEST)



Mixed-use Speculative Project  
 Developer: Andrade Development LLC  
 Architect: Peter Quinn Architects

Nov '08



ARLINGTON STREET ELEVATIONS (VIEW NORTH)  
 SCALE = 1/16

ARLINGTON STREET ELEVATION (VIEW NORTH)  
 SCALE = 1/16

Mar '08



ARLINGTON STREET ELEVATIONS (VIEW NORTH)  
 SCALE = 1/16

ARLINGTON STREET ELEVATION (VIEW NORTH)  
 SCALE = 1/16



Apr '09



ARLINGTON STREET ELEVATIONS (VIEW NORTH)  
 SCALE = 1/8" = 1'-0"

232 ARLINGTON ST  
 ACTON, MA 01720

PREPARED FOR  
 DEDIC ANDRADE  
 DEVELOPMENT LLC

DRAWING TITLE  
 FLOOR  
 PLANS &  
 ELEVATIONS



## Design Review Board – Looking to 2010

On Website:

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Chartered by the BoS to review all commercial projects subject to site plan review in the Town in 2007

## Design Review Board –

- Approach: Collaborative
- Practice: Integrated Design Process (Green Design)
- Serves as a resource for other boards, departments + neighborhoods:
  - ZBA
  - Municipal Properties
  - Historical Commission
  - Town Building Committee
  - West Acton neighborhood



DRB 2009

## Design Review Board – Goals for 2010

- Work on the Comprehensive Community Plan
  - Take an active role in Phase II;
  - Help elaborate what “community character” means today;
- Work with the Planning Board to review Acton Parking Requirements –
- Better understand Project Submission Requirements for Site Plan Review



DRB 2009